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THE FUNERAL ZARI IN TRADITIONAL MALE POLYPHONY

*In fond and respectful memory
of Evsevy (Kukuri) Chokhoniidze*

Of all the rituals existing in Georgia, the most interesting and significant is the lamentation for the deceased and funeral ritual. Due to specific geographic, historical, social and economic conditions, Georgian life has preserved the beliefs, notions and rituals connected with the death of human beings. Though the major part of Georgians are Christian, the traces of different religious forms of the pre-Christian mentality are still quite evident. The origin of the lamentation, according to the scholars' supposition, dates back to the lower paleolithic period. It is supposed that the funeral ritual must have appeared at that time. The most ancient form of the cult of the deceased is the ancestor's cult, which especially intensified in the patriarchal family but, during the breaking up of the tribal system, the ancestor's cult assumed the form of idolizing the leaders and ancestors.

In relatively advanced societies the cult of the dead adopts a religious and cosmogonical significance as well. In ancient Georgia it was closely associated with the reviving and fertility forces of Nature. The dead were regarded as mediators between people and deities (Surguladze, 1984:32). The data on the existence of the lamentation ritual among Georgian tribes dates a long time ago. For example, Leonti Mroveli wrote about the voice-wailing lamenters while describing the lamentation of Parsman the King of Iberia in the 2nd century (Qaukhchishvili, 1955:625). According to the first historian of Queen Tamar, after the death of George III "at the royal court, that was the place of merry songs, now the sound of wailing lamentation was heard with the lamenters scratching their cheeks and beating their chests" (Taqaishvili, 1906:400).

An analysis of historical sources, literary works, ethnographic and folklore material shows that a necessary element of the mourning ceremony has always been and is today singing speech (Zemtsovsky, 1960:222) – a special type of speech representing the syncretic unity of verbal, musical and kinetic articulation.

The mourning ceremony is characterized by great diversity. Despite some peculiarities in some regions most of the features are similar: exclamations, screams, shrieks, wailing, verbal address, singing, playing different instruments, elements of choreography, observing various rules, the ritual repast. The major part of the activities mentioned above is performed in chorus. These rules with their contents and form are related to the traditions of the Caucasian ethnic groups as well as the mourning practice of some of the ancient world's peoples (Old Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Indians of the Vedic times). The study of Georgian musical folklore connected with the funeral and mourning rituals is of a great significance not only for the purpose of achieving a keen insight into the essence of this archaic genre specimen, but also because the imagery world of lamentation and intonational vocabulary are connected with other parts of the genre system. For instance the genre manifests itself in ritual labour songs, in lullabies, in the imagery structure of some weather regulating samples or lyrical songs.

The traditional Georgian lamentation practice has preserved the primitive as well as highly developed forms of artistic thinking that makes it possible to follow the evolution

processes and draw expedient conclusions not only of the local but of the general nature. I completely agree with the concept introduced into modern ethnomusicology asserting that the lamentation genre has a poly-functioning character (Zemtsovsky, 1987:60-70). In the lamentation practice of different peoples screaming, shouting, calling, crying out are the magic means of reviving the dead and establishing communication with them. In the belief of a great number of peoples (and Georgians are among them) the deceased hears every single word. The dead are called out to, they are woken up or lulled to sleep. I would like to mention that sometimes normal (night) and eternal sleep are regarded as identical (Kalandadze and Kotetishvili, 2002:55). At the burial of the son of Rema Shelegia, the famous singer and teacher from Samegrelo, one of Rema's daughters sang *Nana* for her dead brother (Kalandadze and Urushadze, 2003:15). Varlam Simonishvili, famous teacher and singer of Gurian songs, before his death asked his student, Kukuri Yablonsky, to sing *lavnana* for him accompanied by the *chonguri* (Kalandadze and Urushadze, 2004:79).

Deities, ancestors and one's relations are appealed to for help. Death is talked to, it is frightened away as an evil force and attempts are made to prolong life. An analysis of the Georgian material (we mean fixed texts, musical notations, audio and video materials, as well as non-musical context) testifies that lamentation is a ritual phenomenon that has been formulated over centuries. People have a great belief in the magical power of lamentation and without this it is actually inconceivable that a person should be transferred from the world of the living to the world of the dead. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that in the course of time the lamentation ceremony has adopted the form of a certain performance. Proceeding from this, the ritual along with its regular activity has brought forward the spectacular, aesthetic side, as well. The Christian religion also introduced certain corrections into the ceremony.

The Georgian lamentation practice especially stresses the idea of coordinated actions, of being united, of mutual help and support of those who stayed in this world, and consistent with this the major part of the musical material is represented by a group intonational polyphonic singing speech.

In Georgian musical folklore connected with the mourning and funeral ritual a distinguished place is accorded to polyphonic funeral *Zari*. Its distinctive character has a number of causes. Though the Georgian scientific literature has a great number of noteworthy considerations connected with the issue (I have taken into consideration the research works of Dimitri Araqishvili, Ivane Javakhishvili, Grigol Chkhikvadze, Vladimer Akhobadze, Tamar Mamaladze, Ketevan Nakashidze, Manana Ghvtisiashvili and others) in the present study an attempt is still made to touch upon an aspect of the funeral *Zari* which has not been discussed yet and which will help us to perceive the essence and display the artistic value of the dirge. The issue embraces the problems connected with the functional charge of the specimen and the semantic content of its name. While discussing the issue I have in mind the hymn specimen common in eastern Georgia performed by a single or a group of male chanters: This particular version of the song from Eastern Georgia (plains region) has the same name and belongs to the women's repertoire. It also requires a multi-voiced performance (a mourner or two mourners sing solo and the others sing drone as a background), but accordingly the type of the performance, improvisation, and recitative structure is different from Western Georgian versions of this song. *Zruni* from Racha is regarded as a transitional form between Eastern and Western Georgian *Zarit Tirili*. The solo women singers with their recitative fragments remind us of the Eastern Georgian *Zari*, but at

the same time, the group exclamations, based on using *voi*, are similar to Western Georgian examples from the men's repertoire.

The funeral *Zari* has not been observed in Achara. This fact must be ascribed to a different religion, though it is not impossible that special research might reveal some new and significant data.

The funeral *Zari* can be qualified as one of the folklore ritual ceremonies. Its performance is strictly canonized and is associated with the funeral day ceremony, the most high-strung moment of the mourning ritual. It is performed in the yard, in the house, on the way, in the graveyard by a minimum of three male chanters (the lead voice, the second voice and the bass). It deserves a special mention that in Abkhazian reality the *Zari* (*Azar*) is performed during a horse race arranged in remembrance of the deceased. In fact it is a substitute for the Tushetian *Dala* (a funeral *Zari*). The act of performing *Zari* during burial procession deserves special attention. It is part of the complex mourning process accompanying the person on the last ritual path, leading to the other world (see the appendix). The existence of such ritual paths is proved by recent archaeological excavations (Narimanishvili, 2004:12).

Zakaria Paliashvili regards the Svanetian *Zari* performed at the beginning of the 20th century as a mourning traveller's song (ex. 1). "People in rows, with their *qavarjenis* (a spear stick, with an iron end, every Svanetian would have one) on the shoulders and sing the *orpiruli* hymn, which is very tense musically and impressive to watch. Without looking at the mourning women or the coffin you would think that this is some kind of celebration, not a burial" (Paliashvili, 1910:38-39). Also according to Evsey Chokhnelidze *Zari* performed by group of people has a double function: it makes the fact of death more tragic, but at the same time prevents despair, hopelessness, and the feeling of loneliness - the society shares the grief of the individual (Chokhnelidze, 2003:12).

The horsemen sing Abkhazian *Azari* and after that the horse race starts (ex. 2). The most revered jockey is honored by riding the dead person's horse. *Azari* is also performed after the race (Akhobadze, 1956:22-24). According to Vladimer Akhobadze the Abkhazian word *Azari* comes from a Kartvelian (Megrelian-Svanetian) word *Zari* adding the Abkhazian neutral prefix *a*, (e.g.: *chonguri* - Georgian, *achangur* - Abkhazian).

Scholars call the funeral dirge a mixture of singing and crying. This qualification implies an extraordinary refinement and high artistic value acquired through adopting the forms of performance achieved as the result of creating the folklore institute of professionalism (ex. 3). In Guria the *Zari* was performed along with other lamentation chants for the enlightenment of the deceased person's soul. This kind of *Zari* chant was learnt in a church. *Zari* is also unique because it is the only folk song, which was allowed to be taught/learnt in religious schools. It was not supposed to be learnt in a house or in any building, only outside, in the woods or near a river. "I wish to hear *Zari* from you house"- is the worst Gurian curse (Tsuladze, 1971:160). The latter fact can clearly be discerned in the Gurian *Zari* musical style. The listener could observe that the belief in philosophical optimism, in the eternity of the soul and the inseparability of this and the other worlds prevail over the grief and mourning manifestation.

All scholars who have touched upon this specimen of polyphonic lamentation unanimously state its archaic origin, it's dating back to olden times. They discuss the genre proceeding first of all from its archaic origin. The most valuable argument for its archaic origin is the poly-functional character of the *Zari*. The strained, high-strung manner of

the group intonation, the blending of two- and simple three-voice fragments, limited by a small diapason slow bending (fourth, fifth), of the voice to and fro, glissando type cadences, the simultaneous uttering of the verbal text by all the voices, the minimal degree of the *gamghereba* (singing a syllable on several pitches) (except in Guria) – point to early stages of artistic thinking.

The exclamations *vai* and *voi* should be specially emphasized as they distinguish the *Zari* from other lamentation forms (ex. 4). The *Zari* from beginning to end is completely built on these interjections. It is interesting to note that these calls and shouts strongly resemble the Dionysus' orgiastic lamentation during which the exclamation *evoe* was used to mourn the perished deities. (Surguladze, 1984:32). At the end of the 20th century the lamentation recorded in Abkhazia had the following name: *au-ou* (ex. 5).

The funeral *Zari* is a background created for lamentation. In Racha on the funeral day the lamenters stand in the yard. Every lamenter is accompanied to his place by the *Zari*. The lamenter begins wailing and beating his chest. This procession enters the house. Here another group of the *Zari* performers meet them... Then another lamenter is ushered into the house and this ritual keeps going on till the sunset (Nakashidze, 1987:12).

In Guria the double *Zari* performers were invited by well-to-do families. The invited *Zari* performers would mention not only their lamenter but they would also address the host of the family while performing the *Zari*. The lamenters and the *Zari* performers had a preliminary agreement about a high-pitched or low-pitched *Zari*. This kind of activity was sometimes the reason for a subsequent contest (Kajaia, 1980:103).

As a result of historical morphology the *Zari* has little by little turned into the musical design of the lamentation performance. At one stage performing *Zari* at funerals became a profession. The best performers were especially invited; they were paid or offered manual help in return. According to 19th century papers and magazines, the tradition of lamentation accompanied with *Zari* became exaggerated and unhealthy. For example: in 1892 among 150 horsemen, travelling from the village Kulashi to village Aketi for a funeral, only 8 or 10 were *Zari* performers (Tsuladze, 1971:162). It became necessary to fight against unhealthy forms of the tradition.

The other aspects of the *Zari* function can be clearly traced in the ethnographic material. For instance the Racha and Lechkhumi sources have it that the *Zari* is performed with the aim of urging others to cry (Kajaia, 1958:17). As it seems, people realized the physiological necessity of crying and according to the information obtained by Apolon Tsuladze a problem can be formulated as regards the medicinal function of the *Zari*. *Zär*, performed by men, has a special calming effect on mourners. It reduces the chances of depression and without exaggeration brings them to reality (Christensen, 2003:226). During *Zari* the mourners try to follow the performers with their own texts. It is like trying to sing a poem under the accompaniment of the *chonguri* (Tsuladze, 1971:162).

To reveal the *magic* level of the *Zari* function is an object of particular interest and significance. According to Vladimer Akhobadze the *Zari* in Svaneti was performed on special occasions. It was performed only when a very old person died who had not experienced the loss of any younger member of his kinsfolk and passed away happily and died of old age. It seems this kind of person was elevated to the rank of a deity. In Khevi a hundred-year old man (or over), happily aged, who had never experienced any loss of his children, was sometimes called the woman's name *Nana* (Valishivili, 1977:4). Moreover, some people from North Caucasus had a tradition of using swings (rocking

chairs or hammocks) to put such an old man to sleep. By singing him a lullaby they tried to cause eternal sleep (Blaeva, 1988:14).

I suppose that the 'magic semantic' is materialized in such interjections (besides the mentioned interjections there also occur some others, such as: *he, ho, hoi*; sound complexes consisting of separate syllables are often used as well – *i - a, i - e* and others). The musical intonation of the lamentation poly-semantic interjection need to become the object of special study in the future. Promising steps were taken in this direction by Sylvie Bolle-Zemp (Bolle-Zemp, 1994:29-30).

In the context of the magic ritual activity the fear of the dead deserves a special mention. This fear was a universal phenomenon. It was based on the belief that souls could harm living people. This idea and the rules associated with it (immolation, burning the bedding) date back to the pre-Christian period in Georgia (Giorgadze, 1987:47). Using fire to frighten away evil spirits and for purification occurs in other rituals as well. In this light it is noteworthy that the *Zari* performers arrive with lighted candles in their hands. In Guria the respect for the deceased person is measured by the number of lighted candles (Tsuladze, 1971:159).

In Svaneti the *Zari* is performed by old men around the body of the dead person in the circle made of sticks and crutches. Going around the dead body in a circle originated from the drawing of a magic protecting circle. It is noteworthy that such circles are drawn around visitors by the host of the house in order to protect them from a similar disaster (Gagulashvili, 1986:196). Therefore the *Zari* was performed in order to protect people from evil spirits. It must have had the significance of magic spell casting.

I find it expedient to recall a detail in this connection. In old Georgian written sources and dictionaries the *zari* did not occur as a term denoting polyphonic lamentation. In this meaning the terms *vaeba* – mournful weeping or *godeba* – loud wailing – were used. Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani's dictionary has the word *zruni* – crying in a low-pitched voice (Orbeliani, 1991:287), while one of the meanings of the word *zari* is fear, shock (Imnaishvili, 1986:505). In the Georgian language there occur other words with a similar meaning. For instance *tavzari, sazarely, zargankhdili, zarisaghsakhdely, sizare* – fearsome, horrible (Abuladze, 1973:162, 390).

In general a great number of questions appear in connection with the name of this polyphonic specimen. Its name is different from the names of other archaic folklore specimens which, as a rule, have no names given by people. The initial word of the piece or the word most frequently repeated in the text becomes their name. It is highly possible that the generalized title has preserved the magic, communicational (signaling) semantic. It is worth mentioning that a horse would not leave a stable on fire but with the *Zari* (Tsuladze, 1971:161). *Zari* was also performed during a fire to bring horses out of the stable safely.

The name of the specimen might be linked to the timbre semantic of *sarekela* – a kind of musical instrument that sounds like a bell. Furthermore the term *vaeba* is always coupled with *tqeba* (scratching one's cheeks and beating the chest).

Herewith I would like to put forward an issue about the *Zari* belonging to the repertoire of polyphonic lamentation songs performed singularly by men.

Generally speaking, it is the women's prerogative to perform lamentation songs but the non-musical context (e.g. moving or lifting the heavy load) connected with the men's mourning in the mountainous regions of Georgia makes me suppose that *Zari* from the very outset originated from men's group outcries and then became formed and refined due to their artistic creativity. As a result of this, *Zari* can also be included in the group of

work songs. According to folklorist Nugzar Jordania, Svanetians living in Tbilisi sing *Zari* only while lifting the coffin (personal communication). This information works in favour of my opinion. The ancient name of *Zari* should be *vaeba-tqeba*. The formation of the name *Zari* must have been carried out probably after adopting Christianity.

To my mind the study of this remarkable specimen needs to be the object of serious and long-lasting future research.

Translated by MARINA KUBANEISHVILI

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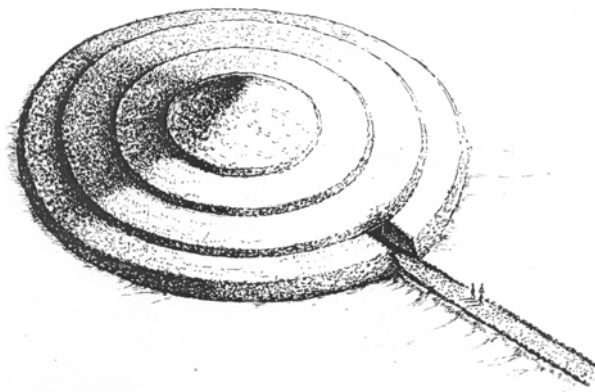
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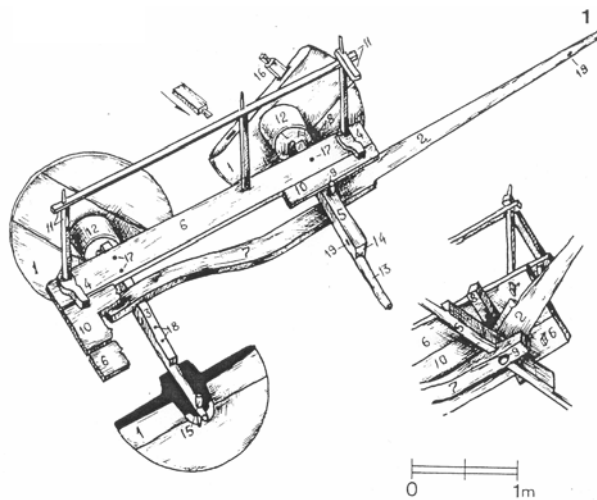
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FIGURE 1. The Materials of Tsalka Archaeological Expedition 1999-2000. Drawings by Sh. Melikidze and G. Tatishvili (Narimanashvili, 2004)

თრიალეთის ყორღანი სარიტუალო გზით.
Trialeti Burial Mound and the Ritual Road



დასაკრძალავი ეტლი
Funeral Carriage



მაგალითი 1. **ზარი** (სვანური). ჩან. 1909 წ. სოფ. მუჯალში ზაქარია ფალიაშვილის მიერ (ფალიაშვილი, 1910:38).

EXAMPLE 1. **Zary** (Svanetian). recorded 1909 in Mujali by Zaqaria Paliashvili (Paliashvili, 1910:38)

Grave $(\text{♩} = 40)$

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სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო
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სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო
so - the. so - the. so - the. so - the. so - the. so

ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო
ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho

სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო - თი. სო
so - the. so - the. so - the. so - the. so - the. so

ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო - ი. ხო
ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho - i. ho

მაგალითი 2. აზარ (აფხაზური). ჩან. 1956 წ. ვლადიმერ ახოზაძის მიერ (ახობაძე, 1956:47).
EXAMPLE 2. Azar (Abkhazian). recorded 1956 by Vladimer Akhobaze (Akhobaze, 1956:47).

Larghetto

უა - რა - დო, ჰა! ჰა - ჰა, ოე, რაე - დო, რაე - და, უა - რაე - და,
ua - ra - da ad libit. do ha ha - - oy - ray - do, ray - da, ua - ray - da,

ჰა! უა - სა - რაე - და, უა - რაე - და, უა - რაე - და, უა - რაე - და,
ha! ua - sa - ray - da, ua - ray - da, ua - ray - da, ua - ray - da,

სი - უა - რაე - და, ჰა! უა - რა - დო, ჰო! უა - სა - რა - დო,
si - ua - ray - da, ha! ua - ra - do, ho! ua - sa - ra - do,

ო - რა - და, ჰა! (ჰა!) ჰო! უა, ჰო!
o - ra - da, ha! (ha!) ho! ua, ho!

უა - რაე - და, რაე - და, უა, ჰა! ჰო!
ua - ray - da, ray - da, ua, ha! h'o

ოუ, ოუ, რა - ედო, ოუ, რაე - და, ო - უ, რაე - და, -
ou, ou, ra - ydo, ou, ray - da, o - u, ray - da,

მაგალითი 3. ზარი (გურული), ჩან. ანზორ ერქომაიშვილის მიერ (ერქომაიშვილი, 1980:47).
 EXAMPLE 3. Zary (Gurian), recorded by Anzor Erqomaishvili (Erqomaishvili, 1980:47).

$\text{♩} = 58$
ad libitum

ვა - ი, ვა - ი, ვა, ვა - ი, ვა!
 va - i, va - i, va, va - i, va!

ვა - - - ი, ვა, ვა!
 va - - - i, va, va!

ვა - ი, ვა - ი, ვა - - - ი!
 va - i, va - i, va - - - i!

ვა - ი, ვა - ი, ვა!
 va - i, va - i, va!

მაგალითი 4. ზარი (მეგრული), ჩან. 1959 წ. წალენჯიხაში ოთარ ჩიჯავაძის მიერ (ჩიჯავაძე, 1974:113).

EXAMPLE 4. Zary (Megrelian), recorded 1959 in Calendjikha by Othar Chidjazvadze (Chidjazvadze, 1974: 113).

Andante ♩ = 66
coro

ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი
vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay

ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი
vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay

ვა - ი, ვა - ი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი
va - y, va - y, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, vay

ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ქაი, ვა - ი, ვაი, ვაი, ვაი! ვაი, ვაი, ვაი!
vay, vay, vay, vay, vay, va - y, vay, vay, vay! vay, vay, vay!

მაგალითი 5. აუოუ (აფხაზური), ჩან. 1979 წ. ტყვარჩელში ვადიმ აშუბას მიერ (აშუბა, 1986: 110).
 EXAMPLE 5. Auou (Abkhazian), recorded 1979 in Tkvarcheli by Vadim Ashuba (Ashuba, 1986: 110).

Largo $\text{♩} = 24$

უოუ. ო, უა, უა, უა! უა, ო, უა, უა, უა!
 uou, o, ua, ua, ua! ua, o, ua, ua, ua!

უოუ. ო, უა, უა, უა! უა, ო, უა, უა, უა!
 uou, o, ua, ua, ua! ua, o, ua, ua, ua!

უოუ. ო, უა, უა, უა! უა, ო, უა, უა, უა!
 uou, o, ua, ua, ua! ua, o, ua, ua, ua!